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ABSTRACT

The problem of student attrition at our colleges and universities has been a major concern of educators and parents alike for many years. This report has as the focal point the plight of the student-athlete in the dropout syndrome. A 5-page questionnaire designed to solicit information regarding selective screening procedures, detection of potential dropouts, and techniques of guidance and counseling, was developed and sent to the athletic directors of 55 liberal arts colleges in Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota. Thirty-eight of the 55 questionnaires were completed and returned; the data are presented along with opinions that were obtained. (HS)

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STUDENT-ATHLETE ATTRITION AMONG SELECTED LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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The problem of student attrition in our colleges and universities has been a major concern of educators and parents alike for many years. A great number of research investigations as well as various attempts at self-analysis dealing with the subject of student attrition have been undertaken by the academic community with the end result being a far better understanding of the various factors which play a significant part in hindering the individual student's normal progress through the academic market place. Based upon the available research in respect to the general college attrition problem, many preventative or corrective measures are currently in existence on many campuses throughout the country in an attempt to diminish or otherwise overcome the difficulties created by the college dropout. These preventative measures often take the form of a variety of techniques designed to assist the student to find himself, to help the individual student to recognize his own particular needs, his strengths, his weaknesses and to allow the student to formulate (with professional assistance and

guidance if necessary) realistic and meaningful goals; goals which will not only serve the student during his brief four year stint at the institution but life's goals as well. Motivation, whether it be extrinsic, intrinsic, or both, plays a major role in the counseling and directing processes so evident on today's modern campus. Close personal contact between the individual student and the institution through one of its representatives-whether a faculty member or a professional counselor-would seem to establish a firm foundation for creating empathy and a meaningful bond between the student and the academic institution.

The available research and literature seems to indicate a need for the establishment of an active channel of communication through which meaningful dialogue may flow in both directions between the student and the college. The existence of these communication channels enables the institution to be more cognizant of each student's individual needs, his abilities, and his problems. This awareness or insight on behalf of the institution into the problems and difficulties faced by the students enables the college to take appropriate measures to assist the student to find his rightful "place" in society, to determine whether or not this "place"

in society necessarily demands four years to be spent at a particular institution of higher learning or at any institution of higher education.

The general discussion of student attrition may be conceptualized as revolving around four basic components:

1. selective screening
2. detection-recognition of needs
3. guidance and counseling
4. follow-up

Examining each of these four phases or segments enables one to realize that student attrition is indeed a very complicated issue and that just as no single factor may be pointed out as <u>the</u> cause of students dropping out of college, no one technique or method of countering the dropout syndrom may be thought of as being all inclusive. Rather, the treatment of this topic necessitates a close examination of the selective screening process, the means of detection of potential dropouts, the techniques utilized in enabling the student himself to overcome his difficulties or to recognize his actual and realistic goals, and the follow-up techniques utilized to determine the progress achieved by the student following professional assistance.

At one time it was thought that by increasing the effectiveness of the selective screening process

for entrance to the institution, the problems of the college dropout would be greatly reduced if not almost totally eliminated. This has not been the case although selective screening can and does, in many institutions, significantly reduce the likelihood of having great numbers of potential dropouts enroll at an institution by refusing admittance to those very high risk candidates. This is where the knowledge and expertise gained through past experience with students who have dropped out, through past experience with the detection and recognition of problems and through experience in assisting students with a wide multitude of difficulties, enables the institution to deny admission to those students whose past achievements and future potential demonstrate that this particular college community and all that it offers will not enable that individual person to realize his particular needs, goals and potential. Recognizing that not every college is suitable for every individual the institution would be doing a great disservice to persons not suitable for the college community if they encouraged the enrollment of such studnts only to find later that such admission created an overwhelming burden to the

student resulting in the individual's dismissal or voluntary absense from the campus. It must be remembered however, that selective screening is but one of the techniques utilized in meeting the challenge of the potential dropout.

Once the student has gained admittance to the college or university a somewhat different process is involved on behalf of the institution in its efforts to combat the dropout problem. This process is concerned with the techniques and methods of detection and the anticipation of problems and needs of students. Some of the potential trouble areas which may adversely affect some college students include:

1. homesickness
2. financial difficulties
3. grades
4. family difficulties
5. student's own personality
6. problems with the opposite sex
7. dislike of the campus
8. dislike of faculty members
9. failure to achieve success
10. desire to transfer to another institution
11. desire to "find" oneself in the "outside world"
12. too high expectations of what college in general would be
13. competition is too great
14. poor peer acceptance
15. protest against society, war, environment
16. lack of clearly descernable goals

Detection of potential dropouts once they have been enrolled at the institution is currently

based upon anticipation (based on previous experience) of students' problems and the presense of meaningful communication channels being created and utilized. It is imperative that avenues be available through which students may make known their desire and need for assistance. The presense of readily available counseling assistance by professional counselors as well as by the regular faculty members is a necessity. Not all students, however, will voluntarily avail themselves to these "official" channels either through failure to recognize their own needs or through ignorance of, fear of, or embarrassment toward the guidance and counseling process.

Thus, institutions utilize various detection techniques including the periodic meetings between the student and his appointed academic advisor. The formal and informal interactions between the student and his advisor (or any faculty or staff member) enables the advisor or faculty member to examine grades and tests results as well as to develop a mutual respect and a bond of confidence with the student thereby enabling the advisor or instructor to grasp a better glimpse of the individual student and the world which the student finds himself in within the institution.

Closely connected with and perhaps inseparable to the processes involved in detection are the processes of guiding and counseling the student. Whether these processes are informal or formal; whether they are undertaken by a faculty member, an appointed advisor or by a staff member in the guidance and counseling office, the ultimate objectives remains the same. That is, to enable the student to see himself as he really is, to realize his limitations and attributes, to recognize his difficulties for what they really are and to enable the student to elect to choose the appropriate course of action which will be most advantageous for him, the student.

To determine the extent of the effectiveness of the assistance given to the student is the responsibility of the institution and its staff. Often such follow-up techniques take the form of a continuous attempt on behalf of the institution to provide services and assistance to the student. Guidance is not a "one shot deal" but rather a continuous process. Guidance cannot be "despensed" like a patent medicine leaving the student on his own to digest the remedy. Rather, it is the school's responsibility to not only cooperate with the student in determining the need, selecting an alternative but also to work with the student in an effort to

determine the end result, to determine whether the student's needs have been met.

PURPOSE OF THIS INVESTIGATION

While there is an abundance of research and related literature concerning the pressing problem of student dropouts from institutions of higher education, there seems to be little if any published reports which have as the focal point the plight of the student-athlete in respect to the dropout syndrom. An investigation was conducted during the 1970-71 academic year to determine specific facts as well as opinions from selected educators which might shed a revealing light on the subject of student-athlete attrition in liberal arts colleges located in four midwestern states.

A five page questionnaire was developed especially for this investigation. The instrument was sent to the director of athletics of fifty-five selected liberal arts institutions of higher learning in the midwestern states of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota. The institutions which served as the population included:

State of Iowa

St. Ambrose College
Simpson College
University of Dubuque
Upper Iowa University
Wartburg College
William Penn College
Iowa Wesleyan College
Loras College
Luther College
Buena Vista College
Central College
Coe College
Cornell College
Graceland College
Grinnell College
Morningside College
Northwestern College
Parsons College

State of Nebraska

Chadron State College
Concordia Teachers College
Dana College
Doane College
Wayne State College
Hastings College
Kearney State College
Midland Lutheran College
Peru State College
Nebraska Wesleyan University

State of South Dakota

Augustana College
Dakota Wesleyan University
Huron College
Northern State College
South Dakota School of Mines
Yankton College
Black Hills State College
Dakota State College
Mount Marty College
Sioux Falls College
Southern State College

State of Minnesota

Augsburg College
Bemidiji State College
Bethel College
Carleton College
Moorehead State College
St. Cloud State College
St. John's University
College of St. Thomas
Concordia College-Morehead
Concordia College-St. Paul
Gustavius Adulphus College
Hamlin University
Macalester College
St. Mary's College
St. Olaf's College
Winona State College

The questionnaire was so constructed as to solicit information regarding selective screening procedures, detection of potential dropouts, techniques of guidance and counseling as well as follow-up procedures in evidence within these

institutions. This investigation was initiated in an attempt to provide insight into the problem of student-athlete attrition within the small liberal arts institution in an effort to facilitate the academic-athletic relationships which exists among the athletes and the institution and faculty and coaching staff. Many of the items included within the instrument were presented in an open-end type of format in an effort to allow and in fact encourage individual responses at length. Thirty-eight percent of the institutions surveyed participated in the investigation.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

In response to the question: Does the institution maintain official records and statistics of general student attrition? The responses indicated:

Yes	72%
No	19%
Not answered	9%

Every institution which had a policy of maintaining such records also makes such information available to all faculty members.

Only eleven percent of the athletic departments surveyed maintain current records of attrition in respect to athletes at their institution.

The institutions investigated had enrollments ranging from a low of 515 students to a high of 5200 students. The number of students participating in athletics ranged from 85 to 330 student-athletes.

In respect to the dropout rate of all students at the institutions, thirty percent was the average percentage cited as being the rate of attrition of the general student body from the freshman year through graduation.

In response to the question as to whether athletes experience greater difficulties in respect to staying in school, fifty-six percent of the institutions indicated that athletes experienced less difficulties; five percent thought that student-athletes had more difficulty while thirty-nine percent indicated that there was no distinction between the athlete and non-athlete in respect to the attrition related difficulties.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents thought that the general topic of athletic attrition should not be thought of as any different from that of the entire student body. Thirty-eight percent indicated that the problems of attrition of the non-athlete and the athlete are indeed different and should be thought of and should be acted upon in a manner dictated by the distinctive causes of each.

There was an average of 6.86 student-athletes who were actual dropouts at each institution surveyed during the 1969-70 academic year.

The most popular time for athletes to dropout of the surveyed institutions was during the freshmen year-as indicated by ninety-four percent of the respondents.

As to the time of the academic year during which the student-athlete actually leaves the institution, the majority of the athletic directors indicated that the spring of the year was the most popular time for athletes to actually make their move away from the institution.

Each athletic director was asked to provide a ranking of the underlying causes behind student-athletes leaving the institution. The listing below provides the ranking of the causes from highest to lowest.

1. money
2. grades
3. homesickness
4. competition is too great (academic, social, athletic)
5. personality of the individual
6. family problems
7. failure to achieve success in athletics
8. too great expectations of what college in general would be like
9. lack of recognized goals

10. desire to transfer to another institution
11. too high expectations of what his specific college would be like
12. girl friend problems
13. dislike of campus
14. desire to find himself in the "outside world"
15. poor peer acceptance
16. protest against society, war, environment
17. dislike of coaching staff

It is interesting to note that the athletic directors classified dislike of coaching staff as being least likely to influence a student-athlete to leave his particular institution.

Forty-four percent of the respondents felt that there is no significant difference in the attrition rate of athletes in one sport over those in other activities. Fifty-six percent disagreed.

However, on the basis of the actual dropouts which took place during 1969-70, football seems to be the sport activity which experiences the greatest number of dropouts--perhaps because of the number of athletes involved. Wrestling, followed by both track and baseball seem to have more dropouts than other athletic activities.

Only thirty-three percent of the departments of athletics have a standing operation plan to utilize in guiding the department's efforts in dealing with the problem of athletic attrition.

Seventy-two percent of the athletic directors indicated that athletes are encouraged to take their problems to the athletic staff rather than to the guidance departments. Twenty-eight percent revealed the policy of encouraging the student-athlete to confide both in the coaching staff as well as to professional staff of the counseling department.

Fifty-two percent of the respondents indicated that they felt that the athletic dropouts in their institutions do in fact state their real reasons for leaving the institutions. Forty-eight percent indicated that dropouts fail to reveal the true motives underlying their decision to leave the institution.

Athletic directors (88 percent) felt that athletes do not tend to leave school because of an increased pressure or stress placed upon the students since the students have assumed the dual role of student and athlete.

Fifty-nine percent believed that the rate of attrition for student-athletes is not significantly different from non-athletes. Forty-one percent indicated that the attrition rate for athletes tended to be lower than for non-athletes.

Tutors or extra academic assistance of the type not available to non-athletes is provided in fourteen percent of the institutions. Eighty-six

percent of the institutions which provided extra academic assistance for athletes indicated that the identical assistance is available for the entire student body.

The athletic directors were evenly divided in their response as to whether athletes are treated in a different manner from non-athletes because they were on an athletic squad. Preferential treatment for athletes revolved around methods of dectection, types of assistance given to student-athletes in terms of academic guidance as well as the efforts made to reinstate the student-athlete once he has dropped out of school.

The athletic directors of the institutions surveyed gave freely of their opinions in respect to ways of reducing student-athlete attrition. The responses were grouped under the general categories of:

1. methods of increasing personal contact
2. techniques of keeping the student-athlete happy
3. methods of developing better contact with the student, his parents, his other teachers
4. recommendations pertaining to more selective entrance requirements
5. recommendations pertaining to guidance for the student-athlete once he arrives on campus

6. sug estions relative to treating athletes as students first
7. suggestions relative to emphasizing that studies remain as the first priority
8. recommendations for more cooperation and active involvement by all faculty and staff in dection, guidance and general counseling of the individual student-athlete.